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ABSTRACT

This booklet, the third and last in a series of monographs on solutions to the problem of school dropouts, is designed to provide guidance for local organizations to address the needs of students at risk of dropping out. It sets forth the goals and objectives of a planning approach that illustrates how local communities could organize to increase graduation rates. The goals, listed in order of importance as determined by representatives of the education field who participated in two national forums of Canadian educators, include: (1) collaboration between organizations and coordination of services; (2) broad review of purpose and goals of education aimed at renewal/restructuring of education; (3) definition of dropout and at-risk students; (4) focus on prevention in the early years; and (5) development of schools' ability to respond as needed to individual students. (JDD)

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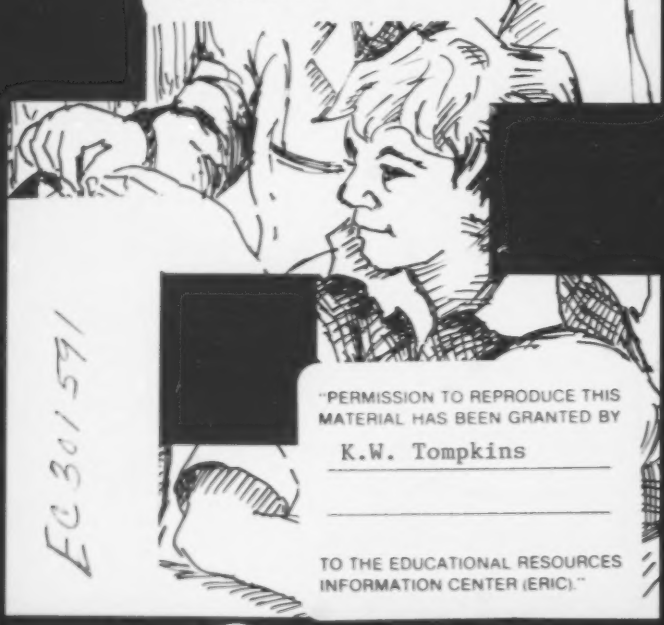

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Stay in School Initiatives

Book 3:

Local Planning Process and Model Goals and Objectives

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Preface

The Canadian Council for Exceptional Children (C.C.E.C.) is a major professional organization in Canada dedicated to improving the quality of education for exceptional children and youth. The mission of the C.C.E.C. is to assist educational leaders to establish new directions in program development and delivery. The C.C.E.C. seeks to develop a future in which:

1. All people are offered equal educational opportunities for growth.
2. Education is the right of every person. Society has the responsibility to extend this opportunity without condition. The C.C.E.C. believes that educating every learner with special needs necessitates an ongoing dialogue between those involved in regular and special education.

With this mission and vision for the future, the C.C.E.C. set out to contribute towards the Stay-In-School Initiative, particularly as there is a high incidence of early school leavers in the population of students with exceptionalities. The C.C.E.C. had two major objectives:

1. To identify the major issues related to maintaining exceptional children in school.
2. To identify future directions and the means to achieve these directions.

To address these objectives the C.C.E.C. organized two National Forums. The first Forum held in Hamilton in October, 1991 included representatives from key decision-makers in education from all the provinces and territories as well as representatives from several national groups. This Forum set the stage and provided the preparatory work for a subgroup of the first Forum to meet in Ottawa in February, 1992. This

subgroup developed an action plan which could be used at the local level in order to address the issues surrounding early school leavers. This action plan is in the form of three monographs.

The C.C.E.C. is pleased to provide these monographs for use by groups and individuals who are concerned about early school leavers. It is only through the development of partnerships and initiatives at the local community level that these issues will be satisfactorily addressed.

The C.C.E.C. wishes to acknowledge the support and involvement of Canada Employment and Immigration in the development of these documents and in the planning process leading to the Forums. This work would not have been possible without that support. Thanks is also extended to participants in both Forums and to the sponsoring organizations for making this work possible.

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Introduction

This is the third and last in a series of monographs designed to provide guidance for local organizations that wish to address the needs of students at risk of dropping out of school. The first monograph is a summary of research concerning dropouts, containing background information on the issue and the second document focuses on the important topic of bringing together the school and community as partners to provide a wide range of social and educational services. This final monograph sets forth the goals and objectives segment of a planning approach to illustrate how local communities could organize to increase graduation rates. These goals and objectives were generated by representatives from the field of education who participated at two National Forums that focused their attention on what to do about students at risk of giving up on school before graduation. Using a combination of large and small group activities, participants at the first National Forum identified five major priorities that they felt should be addressed in local stay-in-school initiatives. Goals that were selected are listed below in order of importance as determined by a priority setting process.

Five Major Priorities

- **Collaboration between organizations and coordination of services**
- **Broad review of purpose and goals of education aimed at renewal/restructuring of education**
- **Definition of dropout and at-risk students**
- **Focus on prevention in the early years**
- **Develop ability of schools to respond as needed to individual student**

Consistent with recommendations coming from research and in keeping with their opinions, Forum members expressed the view that there is no merit in developing piecemeal dropout intervention programs. Such measures result in largely ineffective alterations to a system that needs wholesale restructuring and it was felt that full scale implementation of the four areas: identification and tracking, collaboration and cooperation with the community, early prevention and individualized education, is tantamount to restructuring of schools.

For this document, priorities that were selected at the first Forum were re-ordered by participants at the second forum. It begins with restructuring of schools as an overriding goal that will encompass the four remaining areas that are elements within a comprehensive approach to increasing graduation rates. Under each goal, specific objectives were developed to indicate needed activities to attain major directions suggested by the goals. Keep in mind that these goals and objectives are not presented as a prescription or panacea for any specific community. Using sensitive planning and management procedures that incorporate community/school partnerships, every school, focusing on the needs of students-at-risk of dropping out, is urged to develop its own set of goals and priorities. Goals and objectives itemized below are presented as a model or illustration of a partial plan and as such may suggest directions for local or grassroots action.

Goal #1

Broad review of purpose and goals of education aimed at renewal and restructuring of schools.

The initial intent of this goal was to outline procedures whereby the basic purpose, underlying beliefs and values, supportive policies and legislation in education could be reviewed to ensure that there is commitment to stay-in-school initiatives at all levels of the system. However, educators discussing this topic quickly moved beyond the issue of procedures for conducting such a broad review of the purpose and goals of education to suggest guidelines and specific content or substance for the renewal and restructuring of education.

Deliberations on this goal produced suggested activities that can be sub-divided into seven categories: review process, governance, local stakeholder issues, teacher-focused issues, student-focused issues, curriculum/program issues, and support services. Understandably, there is overlapping content within the categories listed above and also between this section of the report and objectives specified under the remaining four goals of identification and tracking, cooperation and collaboration, early identification and prevention and individualized education. While participants at the second forum stated that a broad review of the purpose and goals of education is needed, they felt this process should not subvert stay-in-school initiatives as a grassroots process in which provincial and national programs take their direction from local action. Finally, it should be emphasized again that while the interests of students at risk of dropping out is the spring board for this

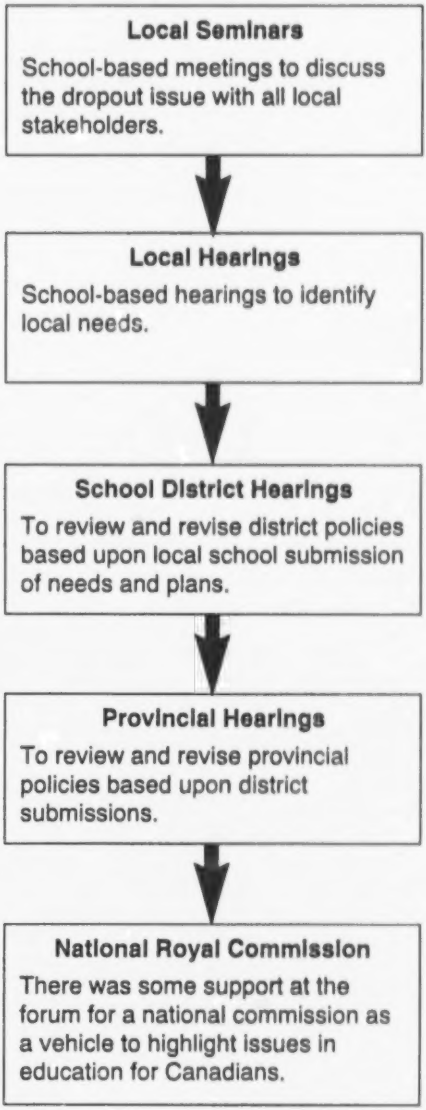
activity, the restructuring proposed herein will be of benefit to all students.

Objectives

Review Process

- To organize a comprehensive program of public education to sensitize community to dropout issue.
  —use media-newspaper radio and TV
  —local seminars
- To conduct local hearings within the catchment areas for local schools that hear and record concerns and recommendations from individuals and interest groups.
  —students
  —dropouts
  —parents
  —educators
  —noneducational agencies
  —industry
  —special interest groups
  —advocacy coalitions
- To review and revise school district policies, based upon plans submitted by local schools.
- To incorporate local school plans into district proposal.
- To review and revise provincial policies based on district submissions.
- To conduct a national level Royal Commission on Education as a vehicle to bring attention of all Canadians to important issues in education.
- To ensure that district, provincial and national policies are responsive to and driven by local needs and plans.

Review Process


Local Seminars
School-based meetings to discuss the dropout issue with all local stakeholders.
Local Hearings
School-based hearings to identify local needs.
School District Hearings
To review and revise district policies based upon local school submission of needs and plans.
Provincial Hearings
To review and revise provincial policies based upon district submissions.
National Royal Commission
There was some support at the forum for a national commission as a vehicle to highlight issues in education for Canadians.

Governance

- To establish school-based stay-in-school committees or task forces with membership from all interest groups in the community to plan and administer stay-in-school initiatives at the local level.
- To establish appropriate authority for school-based stay-in-school planning and implementation mechanism. This will require the development of a working relationship with principals, central office administrators and school boards.
- To develop standards, accountability and monitoring for local stay-in-school programs.
- To develop frameworks and budgets for implementation of stay-in-school plans. It is believed that cost benefits will result from school/community partnerships due to volunteer efforts, cooperation between staff of community agencies and school staff and infusion of money from business.

Local Stakeholder Issues

- To conduct local public awareness campaigns, seminars and hearings aimed at informing the community about the dropout issue and needs of schools and teachers in order to respond to at-risk-students.
- To identify and recruit involvement from all concerned individuals and interest groups in the community.
- To establish a spirit within schools such that schools are part of, not just located in the community.
- To open up the school to widespread, meaningful participation at all levels (planning, management, teaching and student services) involving students, parents, noneducational agencies, industry and other volunteers and to ensure responsibility, commitment and accountability that is commensurate with responsibility for all participants.
- To create a school climate that is friendly and inviting to parents and noneducational partners.

Teacher-Focused Issues

- To professionalize teaching.
- To assign University/College faculty to schools with strong stay-in-school programs to participate in and learn from this experience, and based on this interaction, establish pre-service education programs that incorporate substance from stay-in-school programs.

- To develop teacher education programs that are community-based as a way to promote increased responsiveness to community needs (e.g., community colleges).
- To strengthen connections between local schools and teacher education programs.
- To educate all teachers to procedures that individualize education.
- To educate teachers to establish a balance in curriculum between process and content and cognitive and affective domains.
- To promote differentiated teaching staff in schools with instruction coming from noneducational sectors such as health, social work and industry.
- To provide education in teaching/learning methodologies as needed for noneducational staff.
- To establish the role of teacher as a team member working with volunteers, other professionals, representatives from industry and other noneducational agencies.
- To establish sensitive procedures for screening and selection of teachers and students entering the teaching profession.
- To provide teacher support services for classroom teachers, (e.g., colleagues, principals and parents).
- To ensure that a wide range of teaching technologies are used by teachers to increase probability of suitable match between teaching technology and learning styles (e.g., there is concern that out of approximately 30 different teaching technologies, most teachers utilize 3-5 procedures).

Student-Focused Issues

- To ensure that students are the nucleus for all school restructuring endeavors.
- To create awareness that all students can and want to learn.
- To ensure that all students will be educated in the most enabling or least restrictive environment in his/her neighbourhood school.
- To adopt stay-in-school approaches that do not target students as the problem (e.g., "fix the child") but rather to acknowledge problems with the system and restructure it accordingly.
- To promote teaching/learning and evaluation procedures that emphasize student success.

- To invite all students and parents, where suitable, to participate in development of their own educational programs as a step toward restructuring teacher/student relationships and enabling students to assume responsibility for their own learning.
- To develop programs of study that respond to the individual needs of students.
- To establish a school climate that is pleasant, secure and interesting to students.
- To involve students as resource persons in school programs, (e.g., representatives in planning activities, coaches and officiators for intramural programs, leaders in extra-curricular activities and peer tutors).
- To keep in mind that approaches suggested above, which are successful with students-at-risk of dropping out will have positive implications for all students.

Curriculum/Program Issues

- To establish student records system capable of early (K-3) identification of students-at-risk with safeguards against negative effects of labelling.
- To develop early (K-3) stay-in-school initiatives for at-risk students.
- To establish flexible curriculum/procedures, (e.g., individualized curriculum that responds to individual student needs).
- To establish procedures that prevent grade retention, (e.g., individualized instruction/nongraded classrooms etc.).
- To establish year-round programs.
- To establish a school climate that places value on a wide range of skills and abilities ,not just academics.
- To promote critical thinking skills.
- To establish career components as a part of the curriculum.
- To incorporate developments in communications technology into schools (e.g., computers/videos etc.) as resources to students.
- To adopt a holistic view of the child in the teaching/learning process and provide curriculum with a balance between affective and cognitive domains.

- To review graduation requirements that respond to individual potential of all individual students, (e.g., flexible graduation requirements).
- To identify major transitions in the life span of students, (e.g., Elementary to Jr. High/, Jr. High to High School, High School to Vocational or Post Secondary), and provide support for students through those major transitions.
- To establish the need and value to consider education and training as a continuing, life-long pursuit.
- To offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities in order to keep students interested and involved in school programs, (e.g., cultural and recreational pursuits and especially a strong intramural program).
- To develop a school climate that is characterized by pride in the school, students with a sense of ownership of its programs and a positive school spirit that is shared by staff and students.

Other Support Services

- To avoid programs or services that marginalize students.
- To provide the following services as needed:

  —Remedial services, especially in reading, math and communication
  —Counselling
  —Parent/family support
  —Work experience
  —Transportation
  —Academic services and parent training for pregnant teens
  —Comprehensive child care programs
  —Mentorship programs
  —Food and nutrition
  —Mental health services for teachers

Summary

A major theme in discussions that led to this document was that educational policies at national and provincial levels should be driven by school-based plans and that these plans must be a direct outgrowth of individual student needs. In the context of the two forums it was not possible to generate the details of a budget to ensure the viability of schools that are restructured around stay-in-school initiatives. However, there is a belief that strong community involvement in local schools will generate additional resources in the form of volunteers, more efficient public resources through inter-agency cooperation and resources from business and industry. Additionally a broad base of public support for education is likely to ensure that schools will receive their fair share of public resources.

Goal #2

Defining, identifying and tracking students at risk

The identification of students at risk of dropping out is prerequisite to the determination of their individual needs, tracking them and developing responsive education for them, and therein lies the importance of this goal. It is a goal fraught with many problems including lack of agreement on what constitutes a dropout, inadequate record-keeping systems, difficulty with information-sharing across grades and between agencies and lack of tried and proven models to use as patterns. A major issue is the need for a system that is sensitive to the principle of privacy and confidentiality and avoids the negative consequences of labelling. With this in mind information is offered below concerning definition along with general guidelines for developing or adopting an identification and tracking system.

Definition

A general definition used across Canada is any person who has left secondary school for any reason before graduation. More functional definitions are useful in local settings as set forth below.

A dropout is an individual who:
—was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;
—was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year;

—has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district-approved education program, and
—does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:
-transfer to another public school district, private school, or state or district-approved education program;
-temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness, or
-death.

For the purpose of this definition:
—A school year is the 12-month period of time beginning with the normal opening of school in the fall;
—An individual has graduated from high school or completed an approved education program upon receipt of formal recognition from school authorities;
—A state or district-approved program may include special education programs, home-based instruction, and school sponsored GED preparation (Hoffman, 1990).

Objectives

The purpose of a tracking system is to record individual student programs and follow the progress of students throughout their schooling. General guidelines are offered below to help local communities design or locate a system that meets their needs.

- To establish a committee with appropriate educational and noneducational representation to identify and examine existing systems.
- To develop a system that is simple to use and interpret.
- To use such a system only if it leads directly to development of relevant individualized programs.
- To ensure that the system provides safeguards that prevents negative consequences of labelling.
- To establish a system that accommodates input from all interest groups, parents, teachers, other noneducational agencies and students themselves.
- To establish a process that ensures constant review and up-dating of individual student plans and progress.

- To develop a process that tracks children through school, and bridges major transitions (e.g., primary to intermediate) and between systems (e.g., school to work).
- To incorporate, wherever possible, computer technology for ease of recording, storing and retrieving information.
- To provide education and training in use of the system including teachers, clerical staff, and noneducational agency staff.
- To familiarize teachers, families and noneducational agency staff with risk factors.
- To develop a system that builds on data contained in individualized education plans (I.E.P.s), a topic that is covered in goal #5
- To be on the lookout for tried and proven systems that respond to conditions listed above

An Experimental Tracking System

In British Columbia, the Greater Victoria School District is experimenting with a system which uses bar codes and proposes to use an electronic pen connected to a computer. This system allows teachers to move around the room and record student progress and write anecdotal reports. This information is stored on the computer in the student's file as an ongoing record of individual performance.

Projects such as this bear watching to see if they measure up to the criteria listed above. (Morgan)

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Summary

Following a period of reflection, participants at the Second Forum concluded that there was little to be gained at any level of the system from spending a great deal of time developing a definition. Building on existing definitions, the goal was expanded to focus on an important area that is poorly developed, that of identifying and tracking students. School systems are urged to build on individual educational planning technologies (I.E.P.s) that are well established in the field of special education and will contain much of the content that is needed in a tracking system. Finally, it is essential to adopt procedures that are inexpensive and simple to use in the classroom on a daily basis.

Goal #3

Collaboration between organizations and coordination of services

Discussion at the National Forums on the dropout issue confirmed eagerness on the part of educators to work hand in hand with noneducational agencies. The high priority given to collaboration between organizations and coordination of services responds to concern about the cost to students at risk of poor communication between professionals and fragmented service arrangements. Concern about the need for coordination is long-standing but attempted remedies in the past, mostly top-down approaches, have been largely ineffective. The need for a grassroots approach was a recurring theme in discussion and strong conviction was expressed that cooperation and collaboration is possible at the community level within the catchment area of a local school. Participants suggested that there are lessons to be learned from the experience of schools in small rural settings where professionals and agencies have a history of close contact around the needs of their clients. The experience of recent dropout initiatives in rural areas lend some weight to this notion. The following objectives offer suggestions for improved coordination of services around local schools in response to the needs of students at risk of dropping out.

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Objectives

- To develop a directory of all industries, professional groups and youth service agencies within the catchment area of a local school.
- To promote the local school as a base for collaboration between agencies.
- To create a climate in the school that welcomes other agency personnel.
- To set aside space in the school where collaboration and interaction between stakeholders can take place and where noneducators can provide direct service and learn more about schooling.
- To organize a local committee that focuses specifically on the interests and needs of children and youth.
- To engage in joint planning (teachers, other professionals and noneducational groups) to identify gaps in services and common or overlapping goals.
- To coordinate services around the individual needs of children and youth based on content of individualized education plans (I.E.P.s).
- To plan for pooling of resources and, through joint decision-making of stakeholders, avoid waste and duplication.
- To develop a talent bank or inventory of skills and abilities of all agency staff and volunteers that can be drawn upon to serve students.
- To ensure pay off for all interest groups.
- To draw upon volunteer support to fill gaps in service needs (e.g., during important transitions in the lives of students such as school to work).
- To provide specific education and training concerning collaboration for school administrators, teachers and other agency staff.
- To provide release time for teachers to participate in collaboration activities.
- To encourage school administrators to model or demonstrate collaboration and cooperation.
- To guarantee equality between partners in the collaboration process.
- To extend the boundaries of school to include other sites for teaching and learning.

- To bring community volunteers into the process of cooperation and collaboration.
- To organize an alliance at the local level consisting of educational and social agencies and private nonprofit advocacy organizations.
- To establish a Ministry or Secretariat of Children and Youth at the Provincial level.
- To establish funding policies for local stay-in-school initiatives that are contingent on collaboration and cooperation at the local level.

Summary

Two major themes provide guidelines for cooperation and collaboration. First, in the light of past failed efforts to bring about collaboration and cooperation through "super agency agreements" participants recommended that initiatives for this goal take place at a grassroots level which they defined as the catchment area for a local school. Second, participants agreed that agencies and professionals working together to serve the needs of individual students-at-risk is cooperation and collaboration at its best. Instead of negotiating "super agreements" for collaboration in the abstract that are intended to filter down to the individual, but seldom do, the participants proposed to start at the level of individuals with professionals and various agencies working together to develop and implement I.E.P.s. Agency collaboration through I.E.P.s is consistent with a grassroots approach.

Goal #4

Focus on prevention in the early years of childhood

The majority of dropout programs focus on students at the high school level who are at risk of, or have already dropped out of school. Many of these programs provide valuable support for these individuals but research suggests that they are largely ineffective in reversing a process toward dropping out that began many years earlier. Also these late-breaking interventions have done little to increase overall graduation rates. It is well known that we can target students at risk of dropping out by the time they reach the third grade and often earlier. In an effort to curb high dropout rates what we need is a comprehensive approach that brings together an array of proven services and offers these services at the pre-school and elementary levels.

Objectives

- To provide community-based prenatal programs.
- To provide prenatal counselling and ongoing academic services in the school and community as needed for pregnant teens.
- To provide daycare services for the children of teenage mothers.
- To provide awareness for teachers of early at-risk signals.

Early At-Risk Signals

- **low family income**
- **low family educational level**
- **single parent household**
- **large family**
- **parents or older brothers or sisters who have dropped out**
- **child abuse**

- To ensure privacy and confidentiality.
- To avoid negative consequences of labelling.
- To make certain that identification of risk factors leads to appropriate intervention.
- To develop individual education plans with involvement by teachers, parents and other relevant agencies.
- To provide nutrition and health services as needed by children.
- To provide special services in regular neighborhood schools, as needed for children with special needs.

Personal Risk Factors

- **low self-esteem**
- **low self-confidence**
- **feels unpopular**
- **feels that others see self as less important and as troublemakers**
- **sets short-range rather than long-range goals**
- **driven by immediate rewards**
- **concrete rather than abstract thinker**
- **works part-time, more than 15 hours per week**
- **pregnancy**
- **language difficulty**

School-related Risk Factors

- **dislike of school**
- **enrollment in basic or general rather than advanced courses**
- **low grades in general**
- **poor reading ability**
- **low grades in mathematics and language courses**
- **learning difficulties**
- **academic deficits: at least two grade levels behind in reading and mathematics**
- **truancy: pattern of lateness and skipping classes**
- **little or no participation in extracurricular activities**
- **discipline problems/conflict with school staff**
- **feeling that no one cares and is unwanted at school**

- To ensure a pre-school climate that is interesting, fun and safe.
- To create a school climate in which parents feel welcome.
- To encourage teachers to focus on *how* to teach not just *what* to teach.
- To establish nongraded elementary/primary programs.
- To ensure teaching and learning of basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- To provide tutors as needed.
- To use seniors as volunteers for tutoring and other support services.
- To provide education and training for parents and teachers concerning personal and school-related risk factors.
- To make available a wide range of teaching methodologies in classrooms for matching teaching and learning styles.
- To ensure continuity of funding from pre-school to school.

Summary

There are two major challenges at the level of early intervention to prevent dropping out. The first challenge is to help early childhood educators understand that the dropout issue should be as much a concern for them as for secondary teachers. Since graduation and the specific act of dropping out seems so distant in elementary and preschool, it may be difficult for teachers to relate childhood behavior to that issue. The second challenge concerns parents. It is likely that behind a child at risk of dropping out, there is a parent or family, that in many ways is at risk. By working with parents and family it may be possible to break long standing cycles of failure and lack of involvement in schools. The goal is to draw parents into the school and make them feel comfortable there. We need to gain them as allies in the process of educating their children. As teachers work with parents in the context of serving children they will often be in a position to offer support in other needed and related areas. All of this must be accomplished without inflicting guilt or projecting blame. A right start in school for every child will surely set the stage for positive change in education over the long term.

Goal #5

Develop ability of schools to respond to individual needs of students

The concept of individualizing instruction is a well established tradition in special education and along with inclusion of students with special needs into the educational mainstream it is finding its way into regular classrooms. Good and Brophy (1984) point out that individualized education can be seen in contrast to "the lock step curriculum method in which students are assigned to age-graded classrooms and instruction is geared to the average student at each grade level". They go on to say that "ideal instruction integrates the best aspects of self-contained instruction, open education, and individualization...teachers should make schooling rewarding for all their students, including those who constitute a dissatisfied minority" (pp. 245-246). "Individualization," they say, "implies some degree of planned differentiation in the treatment of students in the same class" (p. 248).

Resistance to individualizing education often comes from teachers who misperceive it as a procedure that is unable to accommodate group work, and is too cumbersome and too time-consuming. Administrative resistance revolves around fear that it is inefficient and costly. If individualized education is to succeed in any given classroom these concerns must be addressed. The following objectives set forth activities aimed at establishing this process in regular classrooms.

Objectives

- To provide education and training for all teachers concerning the concept of individualizing education and procedures for implementation.
- To combine the concept of individualization with the notion of cooperative learning.
- To individualize within the context of mixed groupings (i.e., multi-age and mixed ability levels).
- To ensure students have access to various teaching/learning methodologies.
- To provide individualized education plans (I.E.P.s) with the following elements for all students:

Steps in I.E.P. Development

- **multi-disciplinary assessment covering the following areas:**
  - **—academic**
  - **—health**
  - **—social adaptation**
  - **—pre—vocational/vocational skills**
  - **—psychomotor skills**
  - **—self help skills**
- **long-term goals**
- **short-term objectives**
- **specific services needed to attain objectives**
- **target dates**
- **evaluation**

- To involve all relevant interest groups in the planning process
  - —teachers
  - —parents
  - —students
  - —other psychological/social and health professionals as needed

- To integrate this process and the I.E.P. as a foundation for a tracking process.
- To train teachers in use of computers to handle I.E.P. data.
- To provide for regular review and up-dating of I.E.P.s.
- To provide time for teachers and others to develop and update I.E.P.s.
- To ensure implementation of I.E.P. s and that they are not an end in themselves.
- To ensure that resources are available to implement I.E.P.s.
- To help students develop a sense of personal responsibility for development of I.E.P. s and attaining the goals and objectives in them.
- To ensure that goals and objectives in I.E.P. s are challenging and relevant to students (i.e., provide curriculum that incorporates real life situations such as jobs, careers and family life).
- To ensure that students experience success in working toward goals and objectives of I.E.P.
- To use peers, parents and volunteers to support individualized approach.
- To remember to use total resources in the community in I.E.P. development & implementation:
  —other students
  —health professionals
  —social workers
  —community recreation groups
  —sports and outdoor clubs
  —social/cultural groups
  —religious organizations
  —service clubs
  —business & industry
- To individualize student evaluations in keeping with individualized goals and objectives.
- To review criteria and policies for graduation in the light of varying needs of individuals.
- To provide opportunities for continuing life-long education with continuity across various transitions through I.E.P.s, (e.g., school to work).

Summary

Participants at both National Forums expressed strong convictions that effective education is education that responds to the individual needs of students. It was a theme that was picked up in discussions within all of the goals that were adopted. The major challenge is to garner support for the concept of individualization from teachers and other instructors and this calls for development of efficient and practical procedures. Precedence for implementation of the concept has been developed in the field of special education particularly through the use of I.E.P.s. A further advantage to development and implementation of I.E.P.s is that they could be put to use as a foundation for student tracking systems. Undoubtedly computer technology could be used to advantage. Individualization is rendered more feasible if teachers use flexible groupings and draw upon students, parents, volunteers, and instructors from industry and other community agencies. In all of this, one can see a change from the traditional role of teacher as merely instructor, to a manager of many resource people and a classroom that is no longer confined to the four walls of a school house. Finally, the human service system may become genuinely responsive to individual need if system plans and policies are the product of data from I.E.P.s.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to identify issues surrounding the successful retention in school of students with exceptionalities and to develop plans and strategies to address these issues. In order to accomplish this goal, the Canadian Council for Exceptional Children conducted two National Forums with representation from all major constituencies in education and from all regions in Canada. Participants at the forums quickly broadened the scope of the original purpose to include all children at risk of dropping out of schools arguing that strategies developed for students identified as needing special education will apply to all students including exceptional students. Furthermore, it may be argued that many students at risk of dropping out are unidentified special education students or candidates for special services. As recommendations for dealing with the dropout issue came out, it became clear that all students would benefit from the approaches and services that are recommended.

Throughout the activities of the project, it was intended that practical goals be developed and shared for use at the local level. While recommendations in the monographs have implications for district, provincial and national initiatives, the focus was on local schools and grassroots approaches. Using a simple planning process for establishing goals and objectives, participants at the forums simulated a local planning group and came up with a plan to curb high dropout rates.

It is not intended that the goals and objectives presented here should be adopted by specific schools but rather that they serve as an illustration for both planning process and product. Status reports concerning dropout initiatives from representatives of each Territory and Province indicated that the scope of the problem, needs and resources vary substantially from region to region and even from school to school within districts. It follows that dropout prevention and

intervention approaches too will differ. In terms of goals, priorities will vary and action plans aimed at attaining objectives will depend on available resources and must take into account support and opposition that is present. These variables will differ from one community to another. In Newfoundland, for example, they developed a seven step process as a school-based dropout prevention model.

Newfoundland School-based Dropout Prevention Model

- Organize an all day meeting of school staff to discuss the issue of school dropouts.
- Undertake a thorough study of the dropout situation in your school to determine the precise extent and nature of the problem.
- Develop and implement procedures for the early and accurate identification of warning signs which indicate a student ,may be at risk of dropping out of school.
- Develop a plan for involving parents in their children's education.
- Develop a plan to deal effectively with student absenteeism.
- Implement measures aimed at developing and maintaining positive self-concept among students.
- Attempt any means possible to remediate students' academic deficiencies.

Clearly there is a great deal that one community can learn from another and information gathering and sharing is urged. Participants at the conference gained valuable information from the sharing of ideas and experience and as much as possible of that information is contained in the three monographs. Those of us who were privileged to participate in the forums trust that the information shared here will be useful to you, the organizers, planners and implementors and through you, to be useful to the students at risk of dropping out who deserve no less than equal opportunity to the benefits of a least a high school education. We are convinced that all of our children can and want to learn.

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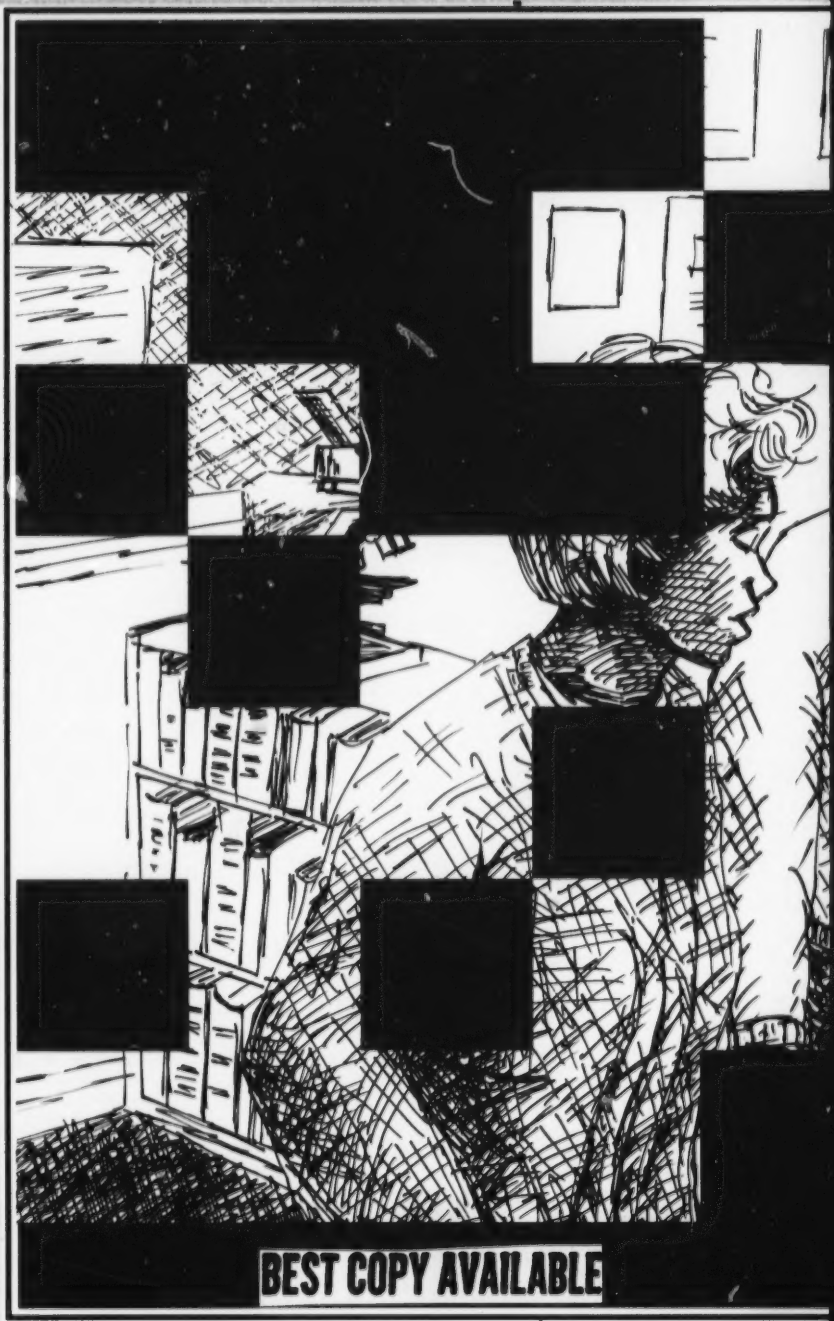

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